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# REACTIONS OF WELFARE WORK ON RELIGIOUS WORK

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*Christian ethics is the gospel finding expression in human service. The writer of this article has had plenty of opportunity for observation. As a missionary in India, as a pastor in America, and as a Red Cross worker during the war period, he has gathered facts which make his opinions weighty. There is no denying that just now the appeal of welfare work is strong to those men who, coming back from war, find the churches less eager to employ them as pastors than are great societies to employ them in relief work. Their going is a loss to the church, but a gain to the morale of welfare work at large. It is to be hoped that the churches will be able to assimilate the new spirit and methods.*

*Dr. Woodburne is now on his way to India.*

Since the beginning of the present century, there are accumulating a body of experiences, having their genesis in social problems and their motive in community welfare, the weight of whose activities has been bearing increasingly on the church. The implication is not that such a movement did not begin until the dawn of the twentieth century, but it has been much more powerful during these years than heretofore.

Especially has the movement accumulated impetus since and because of the Great War. This may be explained by the fact that there were such large numbers of religious leaders, including ministers, priests, and rabbis, engaged in war work. Some of them served in the fighting forces, sharing on a precisely equal footing with men of all sorts in the tribulations and jollifications of soldier life. This intimate contact with all sorts of men, with all the veneer which frequently characterizes a layman's contact with the clergy removed, could not fail to exert a broadening

influence. Thousands of other ministers of religion were engaged in army service as chaplains, and the army chaplain during the war learned to know men as they are, as he never had when engaged in the service of the church. Large numbers of others served in the capacity of social workers in the employ of the various welfare organizations, the Red Cross, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Knights of Columbus, the Jewish Welfare Board, the Salvation Army, or the War Camp Community Service. These organizations also brought their personnel in contact with the real needs and actual problems of men under the most trying circumstances. This is true of all of them, profoundly so of those not designedly religious, as the Red Cross and the War Camp Community Service.

It was inevitable that the return of this large body of welfare workers to their former tasks should be accompanied by a revival of human interests in the sphere of organized religion. It

has been the opportunity of the writer to come into touch with a large number of men who have served in some phase of war work, and all of them have given expression to a similar conviction. That conviction is the impossibility of returning to the church to carry on a program in no wise different, by methods not dissimilar from the program and methods of pre-war days. In some cases the reaction has been so violent that men have decided that they can continue no longer in the work of the ministry. Others are assuming a more moderate attitude, yet insist that the church must assume a larger social outlook than in the past, or else they must break with her.

This shifting attitude of the religious worker who has been engaged in welfare work is due in large measure to his new or revived appreciation of human interests. In the service of the soldier, the chaplain or welfare worker had the consciousness that he was dealing with men in the reality and extremity of their needs, doing for them precisely those things that they needed to have done for them. He could not avoid contrasting this with some of his church experiences of the past when he felt that his time and strength were being spent in doing things for folks which either they did not need at all or else could have done for themselves equally well. Too often in the past he had been primarily a servant of the church and secondarily a minister to the people of the community. Henceforth he aspires to lead the church as a great servant of the people. The real needs of living men and women must have first consideration. If the church is so organized as to minister to that end, it will be to her advantage as well

as to the advantage of the community. If any phase of the church's organization stands in the way of progress toward human betterment, so much the worse for the organization. Organized religion for the welfare worker must be in some measure a cult of humanity.

One of the most interesting of recent publications relating to the issue under discussion is a pamphlet entitled "Social Reconstruction—a general review of the problems and survey of remedies" which is the pronouncement of the National Catholic War Council. Although the concluding paragraph subsumes the problems discussed and solutions offered under ecclesiastical supervision, the interesting feature is the apparently straightforward discussion of social and economic problems from a scientific point of view. The domination of human interests by ecclesiastical is less pronounced, less real than is usually expected from scholars of the church.

There is one difference which has profoundly impressed religious workers engaged in welfare work, that is the difference between the techniques which they have used in the two spheres of activity. In religious work, the emphasis is on the social side. There is more of a tendency to interpret and evaluate the phenomena and events which are encountered than there is to criticize and explain them. In welfare work there is a certain amount of interpretation in terms of morale, but the emphasis is on doing things, on meeting concrete situations. There is a directness of the connection between problem and solution that is often wanting in religious work, and that is of distinct

advantage to the welfare worker. It is true that each sphere of activity can afford to learn something from the technique which the other employs. And the religious worker who is returning to his task after an experience in a welfare agency invariably feels the need for more explicitness, more directness in the attack on his problems. He carries with him a conviction that less interpretation and more activity is needed. In other words, the emphasis passes from doctrine to service. The technique of religion must be a technique for everyday conduct rather than for certain specific times and seasons.

If the church is to minister successfully to the world today with its *mélange* of social problems and perplexities, it must use every available instrument that will lend efficiency to the task. Social psychology and the other social sciences are the tools which science has wrought to work in the laboratory of human groups. The church of today ought to realize her mission as a great agency of social redemption. But ministering to the community demands an understanding of the way or ways in which the group thinks and acts, an appreciation of the group problems and needs, and a determination to offer solutions and satisfactions. That means that the successful minister or church worker must be a practical sociologist. There is no task more demanding than the task of the church in the midst of the world's problems, and he who would be a leader ought to be one of the most widely educated and versatile men in the community.

One of the results of the participation of so many religious workers in wel-

fare activities is a growing consciousness that the time has come for the church to assume a more positive attitude toward current problems and movements. The idea that it is the sole business of the preacher to preach a "simple gospel," and avoid all matters not strictly religious, is fast passing away. Nevertheless it still happens occasionally that when one dares raise his voice in behalf of cleaner politics, improved sanitation, better housing conditions, or any other public welfare, somebody is ready to advise him to keep to his own back yard, and preach the simple gospel. If our religion be the redeeming force that we claim, none of us should be turned aside by such intimidation. The day is upon us when the Christian forces must make positive contributions to such problems, or be brushed aside as negligible factors in the community life. The necessity is twofold, namely, for the preservation of our idealism of which the church has been the doughty defender of the past, and for the sake of the church itself, the very existence of which is threatened if its redemptive influence be not applied to current problems.

Much harm has accrued in the past because the church has taken negative attitudes toward practical social problems. An example may be cited in the question of the disposal of the leisure time of a community, especially of young people. The policy of the church has found expression in many instances in an enumeration of prohibitions to which are attached the penalty of ecclesiastical ostracism. The results have been disastrous. The majority of young people have resented the church's attitude and deliberately made their choice, a choice

unfavorable to the church. The church as a result has been deprived of the invigorating life of the majority of the young people of the community, and has ceased to command their respect and to influence them for righteousness. And the entertainment and recreational activities of the community have been left in the hands of people whose sole interest is separating people from their money, regardless of the result of their offerings on human character. Let it be recognized that the recreational is an integral part of a community's life, and let the church do her part in purging that life of the destructive influences of commercialized recreation, making her contribution to that phase of community life in positive forms.

A similar statement may be made in regard to matters of public health. Anyone who thinks a moment will assent that disease is no ally of piety. Fatigue, fever, cold, aches, and pains are not progenitors of devotion. On the contrary, one is likely to be very irreligious and very immoral under the stress of pain. Consequently the salvation of a community from disease or pestilence of any kind means the removal of hindrances which prevent men and women from the attainment of their highest aspirations. That means that the activities of public health may be conducted from a profoundly religious motive.

We have an analogous situation when we think of political affairs. Unfortunately for political life, it appears to be taken for granted by a great many people that politics are synonymous with intrigue, graft, and corruption. It is assumed that one cannot enter the political arena and maintain his honesty and

integrity. The result is that if a religious leader presumes to express an opinion on matters pertaining to civic, national, or international interest, he makes himself liable to the epithets which politicians are in the habit of hurling at one another. The common practice is the attempt to discredit him as a religious leader. For example when a minister had the courage to voice himself on the attitude of the United States Senate toward the proposed League of Nations, one of our Illinois senators was quoted as expressing his pity for the clergyman's parishioners if he were no better guide in regard to the gospel than in regard to the League of Nations. Certain it is that the redemptive force of the teachings and spirit of Jesus is needed to purge the world's politics. And Christian leaders may expect to be the targets of some of the slander-mongers who prefer things to remain as they are. The only way in which Moloch can be effectually dethroned is by the triumph of the spirit of human brotherhood. It is not surprising that commercialized interests and scheming diplomats should hail with abhorrence the organization of the nations into an internationalism that would take care of the relationships between nations in a peaceful manner. This constitutes a greater argument for the church to be on the alert to counteract the forces seeking to destroy human happiness.

Ignorance is one of mankind's deadliest foes. It works untold harm in a multitude of ways. It is frequently the source of falsehoods in the form of news, rumors, and scandals, thus destroying confidence and liberty. Ignorance is also the frequent cause of

misunderstanding and wounded feeling, where the source of the injury acts unintentionally, yet injudiciously. Ignorance too is commonly the progenitor of disease and other suffering which might be avoided were people better informed regarding methods of prevention and cure. Notwithstanding all the harm of which ignorance has been the cause, religion has sometimes deliberately chosen to ally herself with ignorance on the pious plea that "the wisdom of men is foolishness with God." Surely the time is past when men can be urged to believe the unbelievable on the ground that the incredibility of a doctrine is all the more reason for accepting it. Wisdom and knowledge are light-givers, and the church which fails in the summons to ally itself with education in the fight to throttle this enemy of human progress and welfare is doomed to disappointment and failure. For the conquest of ignorance is often the highway to health, truth, and freedom.

What about the many economic problems that are pressing for solution? The world of affairs is engaged in a tireless grapple with such problems as the high cost of living, the share of labor in production and management, profiteering, reduction of the hours of labor, raising of wages, unemployment, industrial equality between women and men, housing of industrial communities, nationalization of public resources, division of profits between capital and labor, the Americanization of emigrant laborers, protective insurance against unemployment, accidents, illness, and old age, the employment of children, vocational education, etc. These are problems in which everybody is inter-

ested. On the old basis of dividing human interests into two classes, secular and sacred, it would never be presumed that the church should have anything to say regarding problems such as these. It is not to be supposed that the Bible or the church comes to these problems today with any ready-made solutions. But surely it may be expected of the church to bring a weight of influence to bear upon these problems that will turn the scales in the direction of social justice, brotherhood, human welfare, and progress. Dr. S. Z. Batten's article on "The Churches and Social Reconstruction" in the *Biblical World* for November, 1919, is illuminating as showing how many church groups and organizations are declaring themselves in official pronouncements on these great questions. As the author well says:

The church is seriously trying to interpret Christian principles in their full scope and to show men how to create a Christian social order. It is beginning to have a permanently troubled conscience in the presence of slums and red-light districts, disinherited lives, and social injustice. It refuses any longer to accept injustice and poverty, disease and war, as either divine or necessary, and it is growing in determination that these must end.

That brings us to the next observation of a truth that to the welfare worker is axiomatic. The time is upon us when the religious world must reinterpret or rehabilitate its doctrine of right and wrong. In the first place the old doctrine of absolutes must yield before concrete situations. Right and wrong are relativized concepts today. We have to ask questions about the purpose,

the occasion, and the circumstances of an act or event before we are at liberty to pronounce judgment as to its moral validity. Then, too, we should be quick to perceive that today we are thinking and passing judgment about actual, concrete acts and events, when we speak of right and wrong, rather than about things-in-themselves, ethereal abstractions, heaven-sent measuring rods. The great problems, needs, and vexations of humanity are not capable of being abstracted and categorized and subsumed under any one caption, be it never so broad or be it writ in never such big letters. The real business of living brings us into contact with a mass of concrete details, urging upon us our needs under a diversity of circumstances. The wrongs from which we seek deliverance include many wrongs not usually discussed in textbooks on systematic theology. But the broadening of our horizon is inevitable because we are realizing that morality includes all social relationships. So then salvation for the man of today must be more than a mere doctrine of redemption from Satan, sin, and death. It must offer deliverance from disease, war, poverty, ignorance, greed, injustice, graft, corruption, vice, and any other foe to human welfare and progress. The business of redeeming the world is a great achievement, a challenge to all the virility and manhood which the forces of Christianity can summon.

The religious worker engaged in welfare activity can scarcely avoid a reaction in regard to the creeds, liturgies, and hymnologies that are in existence. How remote they seem, for the most part, from the problems and aspirations of red-blooded men and women! How deplorably do they lack in social consciousness! We need not deny that they functioned well in other days when the individualistic consciousness prevailed in human problems, including religion. Nevertheless that does not constitute an argument for their infallibility. It should rather be a goad to the constructive genius of the church of today to seek to interpret the Christian spirit in liturgical expressions and hymns that will respond to the new social mind. The utility of creedal religion and of denominationalism is called into question today as never before. They are not felt to be giving expression to social values as they did in the past. Movements toward church unions and federations are signs of the socialized temperament of the day. Both the existence and servicefulness of the church depend on her ability to adjust herself and the interpretation of the gospel to the changing atmosphere. The world of today is demanding this readjustment of religion to its evolving life, and the church ought to be a step in advance, anticipating the world's need with a liturgy, a hymnology, and a gospel that will answer to the awakened social consciousness.